



File Code: 1950
Date: August 18, 2017

Dear Reader,

This letter is to inform you that the *Midstate Substation to State Rec Road Transmission Line and Forest Plan Amendments* Environmental Assessment (EA) is available for 30-day comment. This letter provides a brief summary of the project and information on the official 30-day public comment period. A copy of this EA is available by request at the address on this letterhead, or by contacting the project leader listed at the end of this letter. This document may also be accessed at the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forest website at: http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=46803

Location Description

The Midstate Transmission Line project is located on the Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District of the Deschutes National Forest, north and east of the community LaPine. The beginning of the project area would be the BPA/ La Pine Substation. The line would then travel from the substation across Finley Butte road, turn east in an existing ROW until it cross under the BPA transmission line. Then the ROW would follow the designated corridor for approximately 9.3 miles (including crossing over two portions of private land and passing the Newberry Estates Subdivision). It would then turn west along North McKay Road (app. 1.4 miles), cross US Highway 97 onto BLM land along State Rec. Road (0.5 miles), then turn north (0.5 miles) to connect to Midstate's State Park Substation. Legal descriptions are as follows: Township 21 South, Range 11 East, Sections, 8, 17, 20, 29, 32 and Township 22 South, Range 11 East, Sections 5, 7, 8, 17, 18, Willamette Meridian.

Purpose and Need

The Deschutes National Forest has identified a need for action on an application submitted by Midstate Electric Company for issuance of a Forest Service Special Use Permit for the proposed transmission line (described below).

Alternatives Considered

This EA assesses the potential effects of two alternatives: a No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) and one Action Alternative (Alternative 2). Other alternatives were considered had issues that deemed them as unsuitable. The proposed route (BPA Corridor) is the shortest most direct route between the two substations helping to keep construction and maintenance costs down while adhering to the Forest Plan for locating new utility lines. Midstate and BPA maintain like facilities so they can coexist in adjacent right-of-ways without any issues.

Alternative 2

Midstate is proposing to construct, operate, and maintain a backup 115 kV transmission line, most of the proposed transmission line is located within a Forest Plan Designated Utility Corridor (currently occupied by a Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) 230kV Transmission Line and 125 foot ROW). Midstate would construct a 50 foot ROW adjacent to the BPA ROW. The Midstate ROW would overlap the existing BPA corridor by 10 feet, reducing the width of the area needing cleared to 40 feet, this 40-foot clearing for the purposes of this EA is referred to as the ROW or Zone 1. Two additional corridors that do not parallel the BPA line would be constructed, one from the BPA Substation to Finley Butte Road and the other along North McKay Road to accommodate the new line.



Table 1. Midstate proposed action miles and acres.

Midstate				
	Miles	Acres		
		Zone 1 (40 feet of Vegetation Clearing)	Zone 2 (50 feet Hazard Trees Felled and Left)	Total Footprint (Zone 1 and Zone 2)
FS	9.3	46.12*	56.36	102.48
BLM	0.6	2.91	3.63	6.54
Other	0.8	3.88	4.85	8.73
Total	10.7	52.91	64.84	117.75

*The portion of the right-of-way along Finley Butte road is approximately 500 feet in length and would be 130 feet in width. This portion of the right-of-way would not have 130 foot swath of vegetation cleared because the right-of-way includes Finley Butte road and other previously cleared areas.

Midstate would fell hazard trees that pose an imminent threat to the new transmission line, these hazard trees would be left on the ground and not removed. This area would add an additional 50 feet to the project area and is designated as Zone 2. The hazard tree zone would receive this type of maintenance in perpetuity of the transmission line. Hazard trees are trees leaning toward or are dead and dying that may jeopardize the transmission line. Not all snags in this zone would be felled, only those that could hit the line. Midstate would not remove healthy trees that are not leaning towards the line.

The Forest Service would cruise the timber and sell it to Midstate for fair market value. Midstate would then be responsible to remove the timber from the project area.

To achieve the purposes of this project and the associated objectives, the Forest Plan, and in particular the Eastside Screens amendment to the plan, needs to be amended to allow for the removal and sale of trees greater than 21 inches diameter at breast height (dbh).

Based on the direction provided in the revised 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219), a review of the provisions 36 CFR 219.8 through 219.11 is required for project level Forest Plan amendments. After a review of these substantive requirements, the following apply to the proposed amendment.

219.10(a)(3) Appropriate placement and sustainable management of infrastructure, such as recreational facilities and transportation and utility corridors.

This substantive requirement does directly apply because the amendment does involve the management and placement of a transmission line. A majority of the project area is located along a utility corridor designated by the Deschutes National Forest LRMP.

219.11(c) Timber harvest for purposes other than timber production. Except as provided in paragraph (d) of this section, the plan may include plan components to allow for timber harvest for purposes other than timber production throughout the plan area, or portions of the plan area, as a tool to assist in achieving or maintaining one or more applicable desired conditions or objectives of the plan in order to protect other multiple use values, and for salvage, sanitation, or public health or safety.

This substantive requirement directly applies to the need for change of the site specific conditions in the Midstate project area. The timber harvest is proposed as a tool to respond to a request from Midstate to construct a backup transmission line. Currently, Midstate has only one transmission line that was built in

1972 which supports its entire system. Any power outage along this line from maintenance or from hazards, such as falling trees could disconnect all of Midstate's customers. The existing transmission line has a 50-year lifespan which is almost expired. It is not feasibly possible for Midstate to leave trees in the ROW. There are roughly 50 \geq 21 inches dbh or about 1.1 trees per acre. Midstate needs to safeguard the reliability of their transmission delivery. By keeping the right-of-way clear of trees it allows Midstate to protect their system and minimize outages. Trees can compromise safety by arcing or sparking which can lead to fire or electrocution. Trees can also cause interruptions in service is adequate clearances are not maintained.

Opportunity to Comment

Notice for the opportunity to comment on this EA will be published in The Bullentin, the newspaper of record. The opportunity to comment ends 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the newspaper of record. Do not rely on any other source for the beginning date of the comment period. The legal notice will be posted to the projects web page. Comments received after the close of the 30-day comment period will be considered but will not have standing for objection. Those wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 218.

NOTICE: Documents associated with this project, including public comments, are part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process 40 CFR parts 1500 – 1508 and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 5 U.S.C. 552. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents or the eligibility to object.

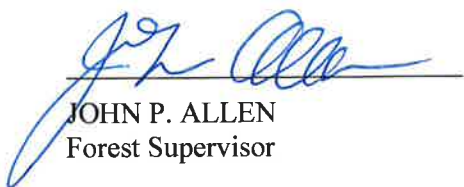
How to Provide Comments

Comments may be submitted electronically to comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@fs.fed.us. Please put "Midstate Transmission Line" in the subject line of your email. Comments must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf), or portable document format (pdf) only. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected.

Comments may also be submitted in writing by mail or in person. Written comments should be sent or delivered to: Kevin Larkin, District Ranger, Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District, 63095 Deschutes Market Road, Bend, OR 97701. Hand-delivered and oral comments may be delivered to the same address during normal business hours: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Anyone wishing to obtain additional information on the project or to provide comments over the phone should contact Cristina Peterson by email, cristinarpeterson@fs.fed.us or by phone at 541-383-4028.

Sincerely,



JOHN P. ALLEN
Forest Supervisor

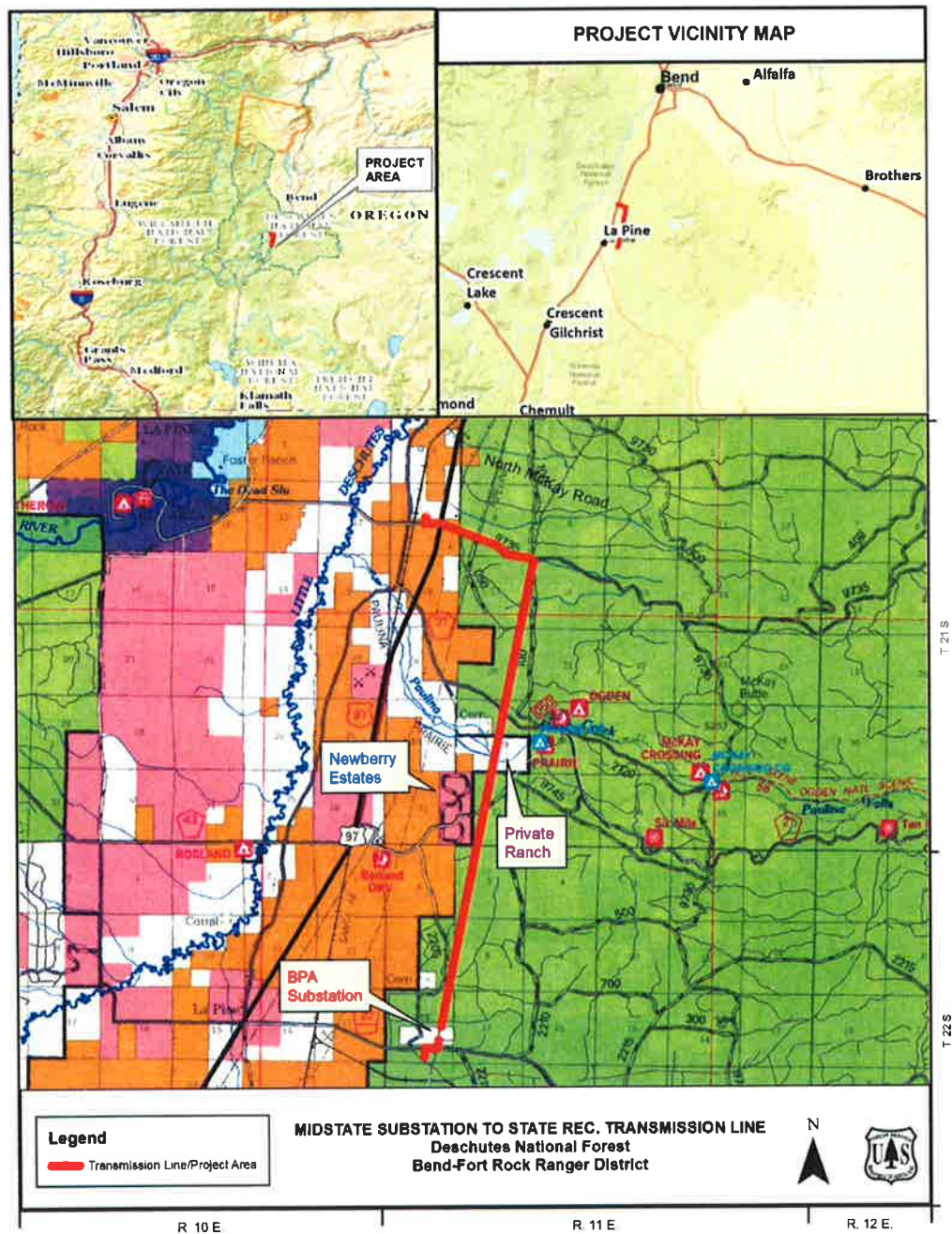


Figure 1-1: Midstate Transmission Line Project Area Map